JAPANESE FAIRY TALE SERIES No. 24.

THE OLD WOMAN WHO LOST HER DUMPLING.

Rendered into English by Lafcadio Hearn.

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Rendered into English by

LAFCADIO HEARN.

LONG, long ago there was a funny old woman, who liked to laugh and to make dumplings of rice-flour.

One day, while she was preparing some dumplings for dinner, she let one fall; and it rolled into a hole in the earthen floor of her little kitchen and disappeared. The old

woman tried to reach it by putting her hand down the hole, and all at once the earth gave way, and the old woman fell in.

She fell quite a distance, but was not a bit hurt; and when she got up on her feet again, she saw that she was standing on a road, just like the road before her house. It was quite light down there; and she could see plenty of rice-fields, but no one in them. How all this happened, I cannot tell you. But it seems that the old woman had fallen into another country.

The road she had fallen upon sloped very much: so, after having looked for her dumpling in vain, she thought that it must have rolled farther away down the slope. She ran down the road to look, crying:—

—"My dumpling, my dumpling!—Where is that dumpling of mine?"

After a little while she saw a stone *Jizô* standing by the roadside, and she said:—

—"O Lord *Jizô*, did you see my dumpling?"

Jizô answered:—

—"Yes, I saw your dumpling rolling by me down the road. But you had better not go any further, because there is a wicked *Oni* living down there, who eats people."

But the old woman only laughed, and ran on further down the road, crying:—"My dumpling, my dumpling!—Where is that dumpling of mine?" And she came to another statue of *Jizô*, and asked it:—

—"O kind Lord *Jizô*, did you see my dumpling?"

And *Jizô* said:—

—"Yes, I saw your dumpling go by a little while ago. But you must not run any further, because there is a wicked *Oni* down there, who eats people."

But she only laughed, and ran on, still

crying out:—"My dumpling, my dumpling! —Where is that dumpling of mine?" And she came to a third *Jizō*, and asked it:—

—"O dear Lord *Jizō*, did you see my dumpling?"

But *Jizō* said:—

—"Don't talk about your dumpling now. Here is the *Oni* coming. Squat down here behind my sleeve, and don't make any noise."

Presently the *Oni* came very close, and stopped and bowed to *Jizō*, and said:—

—"Good-day, *Jizō San!*"

Jizō said good-day, too, very politely.

Then the *Oni* suddenly snuffed the air two or three times in a suspicious way, and cried out:—"*Jizō San, Jizō San!* I smell a smell of mankind somewhere—don't you?"

—"Oh!" said *Jizō*,—"perhaps you are mistaken."

—"No, no!" said the *Oni*, after snuffing the air again, "I smell a smell of mankind.

Then the old woman could not help laughing—

"To-ho-ho!"

—and the *Oni* immediately reached down his big hairy hand

behind *Yisō's* sleeve, and pulled her out,

—still laughing,

"To-ho-ho!"

—"Ah! ha!" cried the *Oni*.

Then *Jizō* said:—

—"What are you going to do with that good old woman? You must not hurt her."

—"I won't," said the *Oni*. "But I will take her home with me to cook for us."

—"*Te-he-he!*" laughed the old woman.

—"Very well," said *Jizō*;—"but you must really be kind to her. If you are not, I shall be very angry."

—"I won't hurt her at all," promised the *Oni*; "and she will only have to do a little work for us every day. Good-bye, *Jizō San*."

Then the *Oni* took the old woman far down the road, till they came to a wide deep river, where there was a boat. He put her into the boat, and took her across the river to his house. It was a very large house.

He led her at once into the kitchen, and told her to cook some dinner for himself and the other *Oni* who lived with him. And he gave her a small wooden rice-paddle, and said:—

—"You must always put only one grain of rice into the pot, and when you stir that one grain of rice in the water with this paddle, the grain will multiply until the pot is full."

So the old woman put just one rice-grain into the pot, as the *Oni* told her, and began to stir it with the paddle; and, as she stirred, the one grain became two,—then four,—then eight,—then sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four, and so on. Every time she moved the paddle the rice increased in quantity; and in a few minutes the great pot was full.

After that, the funny old woman stayed

a long time in the house of the *Oni*, and every day cooked food for him and for all his friends. The *Oni* never hurt or frightened her, and her work was made quite easy by the magic paddle—although she had to cook a very, very great quantity of rice, because an *Oni* eats much more than any human being eats.

But she felt lonely, and always wished very much to go back to her own little house, and make her dumplings. And one day, when the *Oni* were all out somewhere, she thought she would try to run away.

She first took the magic paddle, and slipped it under her girdle; and then she went down to the river. No one saw her; and the boat was there. She got into it, and pushed off; and as she could row very well, she was soon far away from the shore.

But the river was very wide; and she had not rowed more than one-fourth of the way across, when the *Oni*, all of them, came back to the house.

They found that their cook was gone, and the magic paddle, too. They ran down to the river at once, and saw the old woman rowing away very fast.

Perhaps they could not swim: at all events they had no boat; and they thought the only way they could catch the funny old woman would be to drink up all the water of the river before she got to the other bank. So they knelt down, and began to drink so fast that before the old woman had got half way over, the water had become quite low.

But the old woman kept on rowing until the water had got so shallow that the *Ons* stopped drinking, and began to wade across. Then she dropped her oar, took the magic

paddle from her girdle, and shook it at the *Oni*, and made such funny faces that the *Oni* all burst out laughing.

But the moment they laughed, they could not help throwing up all the water they had drunk, and so the river became full again. The *Oni* could not cross; and the funny old woman got safely over to the other side, and ran away up the road as fast as she could.

She never stopped running until she found herself at home again.

After that she was very happy; for she could make dumplings whenever she pleased. Besides, she had the magic paddle to make rice for her. She sold her dumplings to her neighbors and passengers, and in quite a short time she became rich.

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